1: Garnett B-4, 5 (ca. 1880) 1891
MA11 Kurd MA11

CHAPTER II.

KÛRDISH WOMEN: THEIR FAMILY CEREMONIES.

KÛRDISH maidens are, as a rule, allowed to choose 584
their own husbands, and the practice of courtship is not unknown. The father's consent is necessary, though couples sometimes dispense with it by running 583
away together when, for pecuniary or other reasons, it is withheld. Among the families of the chieftains, however, *mariages de convenance* are usual, and the parties are frequently comparative strangers to each other. The ceremony of betrothal consists of a 584
reception at which refreshments are served. The expression "To drink sherbet"[1] signifies with the [272]
Kûrds to celebrate a betrothal. The bridegroom's presence at this ceremony is not necessary, or even usual, and he is generally represented by a near relative, a brother if he has one, who brings with him the customary presents to the bride and her parents.

The great feature at a Kûrdish wedding is the 535
performance of the *tchopee*, or national dance, of which 585
the women are quite as fond as are the peasants of Macedonia and Bulgaria. During marriage festivities,

[1] This favourite Oriental beverage is made of the juice of fruits, cooled with ice or snow.

For the Kurds themselves, safeguard had a more important application. If a man was a member of a group engaged in a vendetta, and had to pass through dangerous territory, he could put himself under the protection of a neutral group whose men provided him with an escort and, should he be killed, was obligated to avenge his death just as if he had been one of its own. 484 579 629

Sanctuary is something of major importance among the Kurds. If a man had committed a crime, usually a murder, he could throw himself on the mercy of the nearest chieftain and the latter was bound by honor to protect him from his pursuers. Often the chieftain paid the badalkhwin or blood-money to the injured parties, although unrelated to them or to the criminal, as a generous gesture. Of greater interest, perhaps, the chieftain provided sanctuary for runaway lovers. If a youth and a maiden fell in love and their parents forbade the match, they sometimes fled together, and, if captured by their irate relatives, would be slain. It is said that the first thing for such fugitives to do is to have intercourse, so they cannot be separated except by death, for a woman who has lost her virginity out of wedlock must be killed by her kinsmen. If the pair were able to reach a chieftain, the latter now acted as a matchmaker. He sought out the parents of the girl, informed them that their daughter was under his protection, attempted to reconcile them to the marriage, by this time consummated, and often paid the dowry of the bride, again, as a matter 696 628 622 [583] 628 584 622 [684]

of generosity. Commoners are not in a position to quarrel with a chieftain, and the problem was usually solved in this way. The youth was summoned and kissed the hand of his reluctant father-in-law, addressing him as a parent. If, however, the fugitive couple belonged to aristocratic houses, the most sanguine of vendettas could follow. 622 628 584

The integrity of its women is perhaps the primary facet of a family's honor. If a Kurd insults anything other than the women of his opponent, he is in danger of being slain himself. If, however, he seriously questions the honor of a woman, the latter must be killed by her relatives, never the accuser. The accusation is thus extremely dangerous, and, although it is sometimes heard in joking exchanges, a serious enunciation cannot be taken lightly. The honor of a man depends very much on that of his female relatives, and the primary rule in this second regard is that no woman, unmarried or married, can have unseemly traffic, specifically intercourse, with any other person than her husband. If a bride cannot demonstrate her virginity, she can be returned to her relatives who are obligated to slay her, although she is not thus sent to them in every case. Similarly, if there is an accusation of adultery, a wife can be directed to the same fate. The woman, it might be said, is always the offender. It follows that if a woman errs in this way and is detected, she must flee, either to a chieftain or 577 562 554 [684] [585] 684 562

is terms of the three questions just noted above. While 565
in principle a man must marry in his own or a higher status, 557
defined by employment and wealth, there is a constant 565
struggle on the part of parents to arrange marriages for 584
their offspring which will be socially advantageous. This
mobility, which has a moderate degree of realization, does
not exist for the opposite ends of the spectrum, for
example, the sons and daughters of a wealthy merchant would
never wed those of a servent, but is rather to be found
among those who neighbor each other in quality. The same 565
things are true of masculine friendship, such as calling 572
at an acquaintance's house. In America the officials of
a company may visit each other and in other ways express
their friendship, but an executive does not normally seek
out intimates among his workmen or pay visits to their
homes, just as in Rowanduz friends are to be found among
those of comparable status. This is clearly indicated by
jesting. A man can always have a joke at the expense of [522]
an inferior, but never the reverse. "Anwar, you do business
like a child," a merchant said to one below him at a
gathering in a chaykhana, evoking general laughter. The
person in question could only shake his head, laughing at
himself, and, of course, immediately sought out someone to
taunt in return nearer his own status. On the other hand, 565
as has been seen, servants, particularly those from the 367
village where almost all belong to the same social stratum,
think of themselves as members of the family, and regularly

uncle (mam) loves the children of his brother as much as his own. If he has daughters, he gives them to his brother's sons as wives. If he is rich, he looks after his nephews and nieces, sending them clothing and money, and supporting the boys in school. If his brother dies, he takes the survivors of the deceased into his own house. When he comes for a visit, he brings gifts for the children. They shout, gathering around him, and the infants are placed on his knees." As in the case of the father and grandfather, boys and girls are expected to stand in the presence of the uncle. The maternal uncle (khal) is a much rarer visitor in the house, although he is also a potential parent-in-law and guardian. "Sometimes the maternal uncle does not like his sister's husband or her children." In the absence of relatives on the paternal side, a widow may apply to her brother for help. The paternal and maternal aunts (pilk) are much more frequent visitors if they do not live within the house itself. Relations with them do not require any extraordinary deferential conduct. The wives of the paternal and maternal uncles, if they are not consanguineal relatives, are treated with greater reserve. Visits are not ordinarily exchanged between a man and his maternal relatives except on infrequent occasions. When a paternal uncle, his wife, or a paternal aunt arrive, they are taken into the bosom of the family. In contrast, the maternal uncle or an unrelated husband of the paternal aunt are usually entertained in the diwankhana

of childhood, but in later life. If a woman is returned for some reason to her parental home, it is as much a reflection on her brothers as on herself. 593 577 554

In all of the situations outlined thus far there has been no question of the veil, except for a maternal uncle and a husband of a paternal aunt who are not permitted to associate freely with all of the women of the house unless they happen to be close friends of its master. The veil enters in between cousins of marriageable age, and the striking difference between a married man and a bachelor is encountered for the first time. When a young man reaches what is considered adulthood, about fifteen or sixteen years, women of other houses begin to conceal their faces from him. If, for example, he visited the house of his father's brother, the latter's wife might appear unveiled to him, but the adult, unmarried daughters of the house would be at least shy and retiring in his presence, usually fleeing at his approach (not, however, losing the opportunity to observe the potential bridegroom from hiding). When he is married, the whole situation changes and he is free to mingle with them unveiled, even alone together in a room. There are, of course, none of these restrictions among male cousins and among female cousins. Two youths who are cousins greet each other by shaking hands or kissing each other on the cheek. It is said that a young man could greet the daughter of his paternal uncle by kissing her on the arm or shoulder, but [584]. 291 882 574 602 835 605

it seems likely that this is only permissable after the two have been engaged to be married. 605 584

The relations between husband and wife are highly variable, depending greatly on the personalities involved. 593 [183] In masculine theory, a wife should be submissive, obeying her husband's wishes as though they were commands and observing the same type of demeanor exhibited to her father. The husband is able to punish her, perhaps by beating, as he might his own child. Reality, however, is otherwise, for there are wives who fulfill this ideal and others who do not, and there appears to be little correspondence to social status in situations in which the wife achieves a dominant position over her husband. The status of a bride within the family is greatly strengthened by the birth of her first son, and she may thereafter command much greater attention and respect from her husband and relatives by marriage. She may be tyrannized by her mother-in-law until this event takes place. Similarly, separations or divorces are less frequent after the birth of a male heir. The wife is the mistress of her household and receives money from the husband for its maintenance. As the recipient of the dowry and an heir of her parents, she enjoys a certain amount of potential independence. Beyond these remarks it is difficult to go further. A number of marriages were described in which the women quickly assumed almost dictatorial powers over their husbands and their households. A daughter of the aristocracy, by virtue of her father's rank, appears to be much less liable to [851] [606] [586] [592]

other on the cheek. Women of the upper classes are much more restricted. If unmarried adults, they cannot ordinarily visit a strange house, and most of their friends are thus derived from among their female relatives. It has been seen that the maids are welcome confidants of wealthy women. When married, they are able to accompany their husbands to alien houses, the latter going to the diwankhana with the men while the women gather in one of the rooms. Women of lower station enjoy much greater freedom, talking with their neighbors out of doors and making use of the women's mosque. After reaching a marriageable age, there is no question of public friendship between boys and girls. If a youth wishes to speak to some maiden, the affair must take place with the greatest secrecy and there are only rare opportunities for such exchanges.

572 562 572 [357] [584] [882]

Turning now to the course of an individual of Rowanduz through life, a person belonging to a family of moderate wealth, birth may be examined first. When a pregnant woman nears the moment of her delivery, a number of women, usually her relatives and friends, attend her in one of the rooms of her husband's house. The expectant father, other male relatives and friends, are not allowed to enter the place of delivery, but wait in the diwankhana or guest-room. A woman who can read from the Quran is called, and when she enters all of the attendants rise. She is seated in a corner of the room and recites in a loud voice while the labor progresses. If such a reader is not available, a copy of the Quran is placed beside the woman in labor.

844 [782]

There is a strong prejudice against unmarried adults, and both youths and maidens are wed by their parents soon after it is believed they have reached maturity, usually at sixteen years for the girls and eighteen for the boys. Strong feeling is also found against arranging the marriage of a daughter younger than one of her unmarried sisters. Romantic love, just as it is understood in Europe and America, is a prominent feature of adolescence, although there is little chance of any physical realization prior to the wedding. A youth and maiden in love may arrange rare meetings in secret, and exchange gifts, embroidered handkerchiefs, flowers, apples, or even rings. If both are literate, they may send notes to one another. Most of these affairs, however, are confined to the exchange of passionate glances at public festivals, such as a birth, a circumcision, or one of the religious feasts, and are ended by one or the other of the two parties being engaged to some other person. Several young men told of their love for girls in adolescence, and how their parents had ultimately betrothed them, youths and maidens alike, to persons they hardly knew or did not particularly desire. It is possible for either a youth or a maiden to balk at such arrangements, occasionally with success. "If a daughter loves a certain youth and her parents ask her to marry another, she may refuse them. She cannot reveal the identity of her loved one to her father or brother (sometimes the youth is unaware of this passion), but her mother usually knows the person of whom she is enamoured,

584 [885] [831] [836]

and, if suitable, tries to arrange the match.[2] As previously noticed, couples on the rarest occasions may elope, taking sanctuary with a chieftain who will arrange their marriage. Almost all, however, defer to the wishes of their elders. 584 ● [583]

When the choice of a bride has been made, by the youth and his parents or by the parents alone, two parties, one of male relatives and friends and the other of females, excluding the boy and his father and mother, are dispatched to the house of the girl, sending notice of their arrival in advance. At this house the men are ushered into the guest-room and the women gather in another room. Many idle pleasantries are exchanged, and the man of the youth's party, in a circuitous fashion, extoll his virtues at length until there is no doubt that the father of the girl understands their errand. No mention is made of a match, in order that the maiden's parent, if the alliance must be declined, may excuse himself gracefully. The parties then take their leave, after arranging a second meeting. The parents of the girl now discuss the matter with their daughter and other relatives of the household. The consent of all, particularly that of the son of the father's brother, must be obtained. At the second meeting with the representatives of the youth, the father of the maiden expresses his approval, if the match is agreed upon, and the important matter of the dowry is decided by relatives other than the parents of the pair concerned.

With this information, the party of the youth again departs, and, if the sums find approval, final negotiations, the dates of the payment of the mugeddam, the first part of the dowry, and the ceremony of betrothal are made. 584

It would be incorrect to relate the ceremonies of betrothal and wedding in Rowanduz to those commonly understood in contemporary Europe or America. In Rowanduz the betrothal corresponds to our civil registration of marriage and the ceremony performed by a priest or minister, and the wedding to our reception and the consummation of the match. For betrothal in Rowanduz, the first formality to be carried out is the civil contract. Representatives of the youth and maiden meet in the court of the judge, the hakim, from whom a document authorizing the marriage, with certain parts left incomplete, is obtained. On the day appointed for the betrothal, the mulla and two witnesses of his selection are summoned to the house of the girl. A party made up of the youth, his father, his male relatives, and friends arrives next. The youth and his father are seated on the floor facing the parent or deputy of the girl, the mulla on one side. The form of the interview, like inheritance, is a matter of religious law, but might be reviewed here briefly. First, the mulla, after reciting from the Quran, asks the father of the girl if he agrees to the match. Receiving an affirmative reply, he now directs that the girl be called. She stands behind a door, concealed from the company. The mulla inquires her name and if she also agrees. Again, receiving affirmation,

asks the same question of the youth. When the youth 584
onsents, the mulla requires the maiden's father or
puty to repeat a formula in which he formally gives the
irl in marriage. Taking up a pen, he then supplies, with
me flourish, the names of the parties concerned and the
ms of the dowry on the contract, and the document is
igned by himself, the two witnesses, the youth, and the
ather of the girl. The ceremony is completed by further
citation from the Quran by the mulla and mutual congratu-
tions. The youth usually kisses the hands of the mulla,
is new father-in-law, and the witnesses.

The festivities of the betrothal are small in com- 585
arison with those of the wedding. There are banquets at
he homes of the parents, and perhaps some dancing and
usic, but these only demand part of a day. The muqeddem, [583]
he primary fraction of the dowry, is typically paid to
he father of the maiden by one of the male relatives of
he suitor when the contract is signed. At the same time,
he mother of the youth sends an expensive gift of jewelry,
racelets and earrings, to the girl. The period between 584
he betrothal and the wedding varies, from several weeks
o a year, and the two persons engaged are permitted great
reedom in their relations. If the youth can meet secretly
ith his fiancée, he may kiss her and present her with a
ing, a plain piece of jewelry, sometimes setting a stone
r cut glass, usually worn on a finger of the right hand.
ome men wear such rings themselves. At the same time, most

girls exhibit shyness and what may be described as willfulness in their behavior. "If the young man is a guest at her house and asks her for a glass of water, she may refuse him and the other people will laugh." Both boy and girl are embarrassed by a certain amount of joking by their elders and companions, and chafing a young man about his coming wedding is a common form of amusement. During this period, the girl's father is expected to have doubled the sum of the muqqadam from his own resources, and it is expended on the clothing, household needs, and jewelry of the prospective bride. Both houses are scenes of intense activity in preparation for the wedding. 584 [522] [583]

When a day has been selected for the wedding celebration, one of the elder men of the youth's family makes a tour of the town, inviting relatives and friends of his household. A similar invitation is issued by the father and brothers of the maiden. Those invited send many gifts of food to the two houses. On the forenoon of the wedding, the mother and sisters of the bride bathe and dress her carefully, rebraiding her hair and staining her hands with henna. Members of her family take presents of henna to the townspeople with which the recipients paint their fingers. One can always recognize a wedding-guest for some weeks afterward by such marks. At the two houses, those of the bridegroom and the bride, parties of guests assemble, and refreshments and banquets are given throughout the day, the brother or most intimate friend of the youth receiving the 585 [302]

4: Hanaan E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

can be attached to what this young man said, so I prefer to stick to the facts available about his immediate family. In the humble village environment (Topzawa) I come across three examples of brides having been brought from Sulaimani as they gave prestige to the village. In the educated milieu, on the other hand, I met a strongly-expressed wish to be linked by marriage with good, prominent families.

Difference in the position of man and woman when contracting marriage. None of the brides in Kurdistan whom I had an opportunity to observe appeared as radiant as we are accustomed to see in our culture. The Kurdish bride either looked remarkably unaffected or else directly resentful. My interpreter's sister, whose wedding preparations and later wedding I witnessed, went about in the days prior to the wedding extremely unkempt and with an attitude of complete indifference. In reply to my question my interpreter told me that it is not the custom for brides to take any part in the preparations, and that out of regard for her future family no impression must be given of exploiting the working capacity of the young woman; in addition, the bride-to-be must not suggest, by paying too much attention to her appearance, that she is interested in being married.

In her study of weddings and marriages in Palestine, Granqvist probably provides an explanation applicable also to the Kurds, for she says[97] that it is the bridegroom who is happy, and with him his family and friends. Happiness prevails in the home of the bridegroom, the house of the wedding. A bride, on the other hand must bewail her fate. Is she not to leave her family home, and will not this home lose a member? Besides, Granqvist points out, it is considered highly unbecoming for a bride to evince happiness.

When, on the other hand, the marriage negotiations began in the case of my interpreter's brother and the wedding arrangements were being discussed, it was planned as a joyous festival, the house next door being borrowed and a dance arranged in its large courtyard. A later letter, dated 23rd August 1958, told me that 600 people were invited to the wedding, and that the dance had lasted from morning to night. As an unmarried son, his accomodation in the home was confined to a mattress which he spread out with the rest of the family, plus a niche behind a mirror for his few effects; his pyjamas (leisure and sleeping garment) lay, when not in use, rolled up on a chair in the guest reception room, which he also used for changing. In a word, he had had only a minimum of room at his disposal. When he married he and his wife would be allotted to their sole use one of the house's three living rooms. He and his wife, at all events initially, would form a cell within the family with a claim to space and a private life—a notable improvement of his position in the home.

Marriage policy and marriage negotiations. "Many families have wanted me", was my interpreter's reply to my question as to what possibilities she had had to be married. In other words she could boast of the fact that many *families* had applied to her's regarding the initiation of the marriage negotiations so essential a preliminary to a marriage in a Muslim area, where the world of man and woman is divided, and a young man meets no women other than his nearest relations with whom marriage is precluded.

In the family home of my interpreter at Sulaimani I had an opportunity of watching at close quarters the marriage negotiations conducted by the young man's family with that of a possible candidate.

4: Honours E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

584 The initiative came from the young man himself. After a sister had left to be married, the son of the house, a 26 year old primary school teacher who naturally lived at home, began to conduct low-toned conversations with "my father's wife" (his stepmother), and with his sister my interpreter. These talks did not take place during the day, so to say openly, but in the evenings after many members of the family had gone to their rest. Confidential whispering went on between the two women and him as to whether they knew a suitable young girl in the homes they visited and whether they would not start negotiating with the mother of such a person. His savings, which he had put by penny by penny, were in the postoffice (not in the bank) and now amounted to a suitable bride price. I was told that the sum amounted to 500 Dinars, equivalent to £500. The reason why, in addition to his sister, he applied to his stepmother[59] rather than to his own mother was, I was told, because the younger wife of his father was better looking, a better conversationalist, and less old-fashioned than his own parent. The prospective bride was chosen from among the older pupils at the Goizha School for Girls where my interpreter was a teacher. As both the young man and the girl belonged to one of the better families in Sulaimani, they had never had anything to do with each other. Once, swathed in her *abá*, the girl had come to deliver a message at her teacher's home, and was told that the young man who had just left was her teacher's brother. This was all the contact the two had had. The girl was described as "very polite". This can be construed as meaning that her appearance was agreeable, her manners pleasing, and that she was well brought up and domestically capable. The families were unrelated to each other.

454 585

As I was away on a trip with my interpreter, I unfortunately missed the first two conversations between the women of the young man's family and the girl's mother, but I learned that the young man's stepmother, accompanied by a female acquaintance of established position, esteemed alike for the wealth of her progeny and her worldly possessions, paid an introductory call on the mother of the young girl on Wednesday, 28th August (1957), and a second visit on Friday, 30th August. At the third visit in the girl's home, both my interpreter and I were present. On this occasion four women of the young man's family negotiated with the sole representative of the girl's family, her mother. The talks took place in the home's guest reception room, which lay at the side of the entrance hall and was entered without passing through the family rooms grouped around a wooded courtyard. No refreshments were offered, not even ice water, which stressed that the talks at that stage were not binding in any way. Whilst all this went on we were seated on a very high-legged, uncomfortable sofa and equally uncomfortable chairs in an otherwise bare room. A cousin of the girl concerned entered the room, but the object of the negotiations put in no appearance[60].

Two matters were discussed at the third meeting: the one was the character of the customary information collected by the girl's family about the young man's reputation, the other, the size and employment of the bride price, which, in my experience, was debated at this stage and not postponed until the drawing up of the marriage contract by the men. Whereas the young man's family had naturally obtained as much information as possible about the girl and her family before seeking contact, it is only after the first meeting that the other side could begin to investigate a possible son-in-law's reputation in the town where, as a man, he spent the major part of his leisure and working hours. In the case I had an opportunity of following, it had apparently been said that the young man

526

4: Hansen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

was rather too interested in money, an Arab game of chance, at the tea house (Sura 5, verse 91 of the Coran forbids gambling). However, these rumours were denied in strong terms by my interpreter, the young man's sister, who invoked Allah to witness the truth of her refutation. The next question to be discussed was the amount of the bride price and how much of it was to be spent upon jewellery, household utensils and so forth. This bride price and its size was peripheralistically referred to by my interpreter as "what one will do for the girl". A third subject also came up for discussion: the young man's appearance. Curiously enough, no photograph was produced although there were photographers in Sulaimani. A plan was concocted whereby the girl's mother—clearly veiled of course—should drive in a car slowly past the small electrician's shop owned by the young man's father, where at the time (the summer holidays) the suitor was. In this way the girl's mother would obtain a glimpse of the person to whom she might decide to hand over her daughter.

It was the intention that the third meeting should be the final one between the women, and that the girl's mother would then place the matter before her husband to secure his sanction to the decisions reached by the women, whereafter the matter passes to the men. After that the girl's father would arrange a meeting between himself as his daughter's suit on the one hand and the young man and his father, possibly accompanied by some friends[9], on the other. In regard to similar situations in the villages, which, however, I had no opportunity to witness, I was told that at one place I30 men from a young man's village assembled to thank a girl's father for having sanctioned the union. These friends and guarantors for the young man's qualifications were served with tea by the girl's father, the prospective bridegroom having supplied the dearest item, namely the enormous quantity of loaf sugar, chopped into big lumps, used on such occasions. This may have been a Kurdish parallel to the engagement meal of the men of the two families that, according to Granqvist[9], is partaken by the Palestinian Arabs.

Incidentally, after this third and final meeting of women, my interpreter declared that it would be fitting if some time elapsed before the meeting between the men took place, as it did not look well for the young man's family to evince too great an eagerness after the marriage had been arranged. My return to Denmark stopped me from following the matter on the spot, but a letter from Mallin brought me further news. She wrote: *"Please you asked me about my brothers wife. She is not the same girl which we with you were to their house because we did'nt agree with the family, so we took another girl from the best Kurdish family. Her father is Sheikh Mahmoud's cousin which you met his son Baba Ali"*. From this letter it appears that it is possible for the young man's family to break off marriage negotiations at a relatively late date. It also seems from the words "*we took ....*" that it was not the young man himself, but the family, in the first instance its female members, which changed the prospective bride. No mention is made of the girl's appearance or qualifications; the most important factor in the urban milieu apparently is to become related to a family of good repute and high social position.

To sum up the question of marriage negotiations in urban circles, it can be said that the bride need not be sought within the family. The father's brother's daughter marriage appeared to be practised by the village aristocracy. Marriage was a matter of family policy, weight being attached to the social prominence of the family with which a marriage alliance is sought. The women of the young man's

family select the prospective bride, also when the first choice is dropped, as mentioned above. It is the women who conduct the preliminary negotiations[91], which are concluded by a meeting between the men of the two families implicated.

The girl can refuse to agree to the union, but this, I was told, is regarded as a great insult. According to the law the father and grandfather have an *ex officio* right to marry off a minor daughter or granddaughter without obtaining her permission[92].

In the meantime a Kurdish girl can oppose the concept of marriage itself. My interpreter, an extremely intelligent girl, hoped to be able to continue her education abroad, a thing the city authorities perceived as holding out as a possibility, and therefore did not wish to marry for the time being. I did not come across any example of a father or mother forcing a daughter into marriage. There was, on the other hand, a case where a father had forced a young son to marry a girl fifteen years older. To avoid this forced marriage the young man fled to the mountains, but in vain. The father got his way. While in Kurdistan I met the woman in question and the fruits of the marriage, a little girl; the husband I only saw at a distance.

In regard to the age at which marriage is contracted, there is the case of my interpreter's half-sister, who became a bride at the age of twelve. Asked if she could consider being married, she remained silent[93]. I was told that she had been big and strong for her age. Her two children had been born when she was 16 and 18, and she and they looked quite healthy and sound. In Halabja I lived in a home where the then 25 year old wife had been married at the age of 11, her husband then having been 25[94]. Her first child was born 6-7 years after the marriage. It was said that in the districts around Tawella, to which many families moved just for most of the summer on account of the work in the mulberry plantations there, and adolescent boys and girls picked fruit together, that, failing the protection afforded to their virginity by a home, it was common for girls to be married before reaching puberty. In Balkha brides of 11-12 were mentioned. Here the reason for the early entry into the married state was said to be the shortage of adult women, but it was also averred that the first child was not born for 6-7 years after the wedding. Maternity before the girl is full-grown, as met with in India, does not therefore, appear to be usual in Southern Kurdistan.

It might be expected that a girl of 11 or 12 would as a housewife be little use to a man, but my interpreter told me that a girl of this age—to us but a child—although completely uneducated and illiterate, was on the other hand domestically accomplished and fully aware of the behaviour expected of her in her new home. In consequence no major difficulties existed. As a parallel to this we have what Kaberry[95] says about the conditions of the Australian aborigines. Here a child bride of 9-11 is fully trained in the pattern of behaviour expected of her, has some sexual knowledge, is prepared for her wifely duties, and therefore cannot in any way be compared with a European schoolgirl of a similar age.

---

585 *Her marriage contract.* A church or civil wedding is the main feature of a marriage contracted in the West, and conditions in the event of divorce, death of the spouse, and the wife's economic position during marriage are not laid down at that time. The drawing up of a marriage settlement and separate estate are still not regarded as really good form, and, despite the large percentage, divorce is not taken into consideration. Questions of inheritance are also arranged later, if at all.

4: Hansen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

585 114 581 971 581 971

the deed is drawn up at the judge's residence and not in a mosque, which is a place of prayer and not (like Christian churches) a form of registration office. The same view is to be found in Blackman[586], who says that among Muslims no religious ceremony takes place—marriage is not a sacrament. Levy also states that "in Islām marriage is a secular contract and not a religious rite"[587]. This is not in accord with Kurdish conditions. That the drawing up of a marriage settlement here seems to be covered by religious precepts seems to be indicated by, for example, the presence of the *mulla*. According to Jayakar[588] matrimonial law and the rights of inheritance are generally considered more or less connected with religion, and within the dual legal system, spiritual and temporal, matrimonial and family rights fall to the spiritual judge. Islam is more than a religion, it is a whole system comprising all aspects of human life[589]. It would be highly remarkable if the drawing up of the marriage settlement should be a temporal act in view of the fact that the justification for the paying of a bride price is found in the Coran[590]. Rather can it be said that the drawing up of a marriage settlement within the *shāri'* rite of Islām, which the Kurds follow, is an act connected with religion. What on the other hand is distinct from the drawing up of the marriage settlement is the consummation of the marriage, which failing a better expression, what can be termed "the wedding". It has nothing to do either with the secular or spiritual authorities, being a purely private affair that sooner or later, often years after the drawing up of the marriage settlement, takes place in the form of a family festival with friends. This occasion, as opposed to the drawing up of the marriage settlement, can be said to be a secular, and particularly a quite private, action.

---

584 369

The social intercourse of engaged couples in the event of prospective spouses knowing each other. In the educated urban milieu of Sulaimani I met one example of a couple who knew each other before marriage and had themselves chosen each other. This, of course, is the exception and was due entirely to their milieu.

The girl in the case was the 23 year old sister of my interpreter. Both she and the young man in question were primary schoolteachers who had met as colleagues and fallen in love. When the young man realized his interest in the girl he had applied to my interpreter, also a schoolteacher, as his family lived outside in one of the village areas from which no woman, mother or sister, was able to act as go-between. He told her that "he would like to be admitted to her family", and asked if she would act as his advocate and place the matter before her father. This had been done and the marriage settlement had been drawn up a year before my stay in Kurdistan. The wedding festival was imminent and took place whilst I lived with the family. In the months prior to the wedding I was able to study the pattern of behaviour applying to former colleagues now engaged, and the position of the prospective groom in the family he was to enter.

By the marriage settlement the young man became a member of the family to such an extent that he was able, with her 13 year old half-brother, to accompany my interpreter to the village of Tuqawa where she was to live with me in the sheikh's house. The night he spent there in order to act as an important escort and to investigate whether conditions there were sufficiently re-assuring, he was able to sleep in the same room as her half-brother and herself. My interpreter explained that she might

4: Hansen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

sleep in the same room as those with whom marriage was precluded. After the drawing up of the marriage settlement he was thus considered as already her brother-in-law. (That engagements are just as binding as marriage is mentioned by Blackman[111] in regard to the Egyptian *fellāhīn*). On the other hand, he was never alone with his fiancée. My interpreter was always present in the guest room when the two young people were talking together, and he did not very often pay a visit. They never went to the cinema or paid calls together. She wore the white veil over her head when speaking to him, but at the same time went about in a remarkably slovenly way, attired in old, dirty clothes. The two young people were to go together to Baghdad to buy furniture and clothes with that part of the paid-up bride price that was not to be expended in jewellery. The furniture items were to be in the most modern Baghdadi style, bedroom suit in polished wood and so forth. My interpreter, the elder sister, joined the party which consisted of the couple and a half-sister, 15 years old, who was to be given the chance of seeing the capital. They stayed at an Iraqi-Arab hotel in the main thoroughfare, Rashid Street. My interpreter informed me that all four shared a room in which they had both slept and eaten their meals, prepared food having been bought at shops in the town. As at home there was no undressing at night. Later I stayed with my interpreter and her 26 year old brother at the same hotel. Here also only one room was ordered for the three of us. During the stay at Baghdad the young couple were never alone but under the surveillance of the two sisters with them.

When the prospective bride was on an excursion by car with the women of the house and her elder brother, she (and the other women) wore *abā* and veil, great care being taken that the veil was not lifted or shifted. It was explained that this was in order that nothing could be said about her either by her prospective husband or her future in-laws. There was no actual sign of avoidance as is mentioned by Granqvist[112] in regard to the Palestinian Arabs, where the young people must not meet each other whilst they are engaged, and the prospective bride must hide herself when the young man pays a visit to the home. However, the young people in my interpreter's home at Sulaimani appeared to be surrounded by more restrictions in their affianced state than they had been when they first met as colleagues at the school.

The bride price[113]. Its employment and sociological significance.

The bride price *mahr* is mentioned in the Coran, Sure 4, verse 4 and Sure 5, verse 3, as the ordained morning-gift, for it expressly lays down that the Faithful are permitted to take in marriage virtuous women of the believers and virtuous women of the peoples who received the scripture earlier—that is to say Jews and Christians, when they give them their marriage portions and live with them in honour. As early as 1778 Niebuhr reports that the Kurds in the then Turkish territories differed from the Arabs in that greater pleasure was evinced at the birth of a daughter than of a son, as a good bride price could later be obtained for her, only a small trousseau being given her in return, whereas the Arabs and Turks expend the whole bride price on the bride's effects and even add to it. Niebuhr concludes by saying: "many daughters are thus with them a source of wealth[114]".

In a humble village miller, Balkha, I was told that a 11–12 year old bride was acquired for a bride price of 20 Din., plus a dress for the bride. Whether the sum was paid out in cash or in kind, cattle etc. was not stated. Bishop[115] says of the Bakhtiari that the bride price can be paid in the form of a

4: Hansen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

As regards being restricted geographically there was no seclusion for educated urban women, though in its "transportable" form seclusion existed, for the wearing of over-garment and veil was obligatory. Just as the geographical form of seclusion applying to the women of the village aristocracy was elastic, certain categories of males outside the immediate family circle being admitted to the women's domain, so also was the "transportable" seclusion, for the degree of veiling depended upon the man meeting the woman. If the man was a stranger, say the post-office clerk, bank teller, or bus driver, complete veiling was maintained. The men on their side accepted it as perfectly natural that women whom they served or bargained with were completely anonymous and, apart from the voice, unidentifiable. Before superiors, for example the educational authorities or officials like the mayor of the town, my interpreter pushed back her veil though at the same time holding the front edges of the over-garment which goes over the head, so closely together that only a small part of her face was visible. This was the case on more official visits, but also on ordinary visits the tightly-drawn *abd* and the pushed-back veil were retained. This I saw on a visit to Sheikh Mahmud's son. On this occasion my interpreter had decked herself out in all the finest articles of clothing and jewellery the women of her family could together produce. During the visit not the slightest glimpse of all this magnificence was disclosed. Perhaps this was due to the fact that, in addition to us, two male agricultural experts were present, who seemed to have come to discuss questions in connexion with the rice harvest that year.

When dealing with traders in the *sūq*, for example in the cloth booths in the vaulted arcades, the women also pushed back their veils. Here they apparently faced men in a position subordinate to them, and could allow themselves to show a small expanse of face through the closely-held *abd*.

In the Sulaimani cinemas, both the roofed and the roofless, it would have been quite unthinkable for the women, even though closely veiled, to sit in the ordinary seats. The men sat there. For the women and the men of their family who accompanied them there were boxes with special entrances and a curtain. This curtain was not drawn aside until the theatre was dark, and was again drawn at the interval. Men in the audience must not obtain a glimpse of the women in the box.

In her outside life and during work the educated urban woman came into contact with the men's world. Sympathy between two young people might be aroused and a marriage based on personal contact and sentiment could result. However, there was no direct proposal on the part of the young man. The obligatory procedure was marriage negotiations between the women of the two families, followed by the matter being placed before the father for decision (see p. 119). Whereas the work of an educated urban woman provided her with a radius of action far outside the boundaries of the home, in non-working hours she was to be found in the precincts of the home. In leisure hours there were no mixed groups of men and women. Men, on the other hand, spent their free time in the streets or in tea houses in company with other men. Here again there was a strict division between the worlds of men and women.

Thus, like her humble village sister, the educated urban woman possessed a freedom of movement that extended just as far as, but no further than, her work outside the home justified, but, as opposed to the village woman, the educated urban woman practised a transportable seclusion in the form of *abd* and veil. This, like the seclusion of the aristocratic village woman, possessed a certain elasticity in regard to certain male categories.

4: Hansen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

dream of not having to face a united women's front of, say, mother, wives (usually chosen by the women of his family), plus sisters, daughters half and fully grown, who ordered his life from start to finish. In an "educated wife" he hoped to obtain compensation for the social and emotional contact he was now forced to seek during the hours of day with other men.

This leads us to a discussion of the Islamic, and thus the Kurdish woman's marital position and the marriages arranged by the family. As already mentioned, the choice of a young man's married partner is practically always left to the women of his family, that is to say the mother or step-mother and sisters, whereafter the matter is laid before the father for approval. In regard to the fact that married couples in many cases have never seen each other before the marriage is to be consummated, the general Western idea is that it must be difficult for a young girl to be given to an unknown man. However, it must be equally trying for the young man. This is also pointed to by Granqvist when she says[4]: "In what concerns a woman's lack of freedom in her marriage the same thing holds good to a great extent of the young man".

It was characteristic that the brother of Sheikh Taifûr in Topzawa, who was thinking of going to Europe, asked me if it really was true that one could walk up to any woman in the street and offer her marriage. That was his first impression of liberty of choice in Europe. He had never envisaged any sentimental basis for marriage.

The young woman is thus selected by the women with whom she will have to live and work, as the young couple usually dwells in the bridegroom's home. She must beforehand feel highly-prized by the bride price paid out on the contraction of marriage, which is expended to a greater or lesser degree on the luxury with which she is to be surrounded. In most cases she knows the women who are to be her daily companions and fellow-workers. From her own home she is well trained in the domestic work that can be expected of her. She has been brought up with the quite natural idea that her most important destiny and greatest happiness is to be allowed to bear children. From the years spent in the home among other women she has heard and witnessed everything worth knowing about the difficulties of matrimonial relations. She is not expected to be her husband's comrade on a spiritual or intellectual level. The basis for the joint family idea, with several generations housed within the the same building is a married life of a different nature, less organised than in our culture pattern. During the day the husband, even among the village aristocracy, has little opportunity of companionship with his wife, as the great boundary between the form of life of men and women compelled him to seek the society of other men, whilst on her side the woman enters the feminine half of the community. On entering marriage, a young woman, in addition to her own personal qualities, is regarded as a representative of a whole family, with which it has been felt desirable to become allied. She arrives in an aura of her own family's glory. She herself had no personal expectations beyond the advantages to be derived from the married state and the fulfilment of a woman's natural desire to have children. As young people in good families had not seen each other before marriage, it was obvious that no sentimental basis existed on which to start the union, but this did not mean that later on a high degree of sympathy might not develop between husband and wife and that this was quite

4: Hansen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

562 593 sufficient to ensure an harmonious life together, particularly because the culture pattern more or less separated the couple during the day. The young woman was thus faced with demands she was able to fulfil, highly-valued beforehand, with a prospect of a gain if greater sympathy or love was born between herself and her mate. She was but little subjected to comparison with other women, for in his outside life the husband never met them; the wives of his friends he never saw. In the home he met only those with whom marriage was out of the question. The threats to her marriage were thus not the chances that at his place of work or in society her husband met and fell in love with another woman, but were far more logically justified. If life together proved impossible, both husband and [586] wife could secure the dissolution of the marriage (see p. 121). Should she bear no children, or no sons, an extra wife was justified. This might mean that the family of the other wife stipulated that the first wife should be renounced, or that the two women could not tolerate daily life together. By the stipulation of a large sum to be set aside for the contingency of divorce, the wife's family assured the bride beforehand as adequately as was humanly possible.

---

584 The man, on the other hand, gave everything he owned at the time, perhaps assisted by his family, for a woman who was certainly to the taste of his female relatives, but not necessarily to his. Should he not like his bride after the marriage had taken place, he had in the first place invested a lot of money in this disappointment, and secondly had to maintain his case against the women of his family, who had selected her. A new wife of the four sanctioned by the Coran, depending upon one's economic circumstances, was another unknown ticket in the marriage lottery.

593 562 [586] From the moment a man passed from the unmarried to the married state, he was for the rest of his life the head of a family. As the bride price was paid when marriage was contracted, the husband had not only the right but also the duty to keep the children[42] in the event of divorce. Quite small children, it is true, stayed with the mother until they had reached a certain age, but then returned to the father. In the event of a fresh marriage a man thus had no chance of leaving his children. The new wife, or [587] wives, who entered his home took over the work of looking after the brood of children that might already be there. This provided the children with a stable home and childhood, something that is not always the case in the West. The constant factors in the home were thus, theoretically, the father and the children, whilst the mother was the fluctuating point. This gave father, mother and children a mutual status quite different from the position of these three home elements in our culture.

Considerable attention has been paid to the difficulties that could arise between women when one more of the four wives sanctioned by religion was acquired. Little attention has been paid, on the other hand, to the difficulties facing the new wife when the home she entered had adolescent or adult 562 children. Nor has much consideration been given to the possibility that the stationary children, whom 586 the father is unable to marry off, may intervene in favour of their mother after she has been renounced 593 by the father. My interpreter's mother, for example, was repudiated and sent back to her family, leaving behind her three children aged about 6, 7 and 8 (see p. 137). When these children reached the age of discretion, they demanded the return of their mother, and the father was forced to give way.

592 case of bereavement and need. This obligation supposedly passes to nearest agnatic male relative, but practice is in fact very elastic, and follows «reasonable» arguments of residence and means.

Since each household is generally based on one elementary family, the marriage tie is the pivot on which household organization rests.
• 584 The verbalized theory on choice of spouse is quite simple. A man decides he wants to marry a certain girl — any girl. He chooses a reliable representative — preferably an older male relative — and the representative visits the father of the girl and makes the proposition. Considerable subtle diplomacy is performed by both sides in fixing a tentative brideprice. If the young man accepts the price, preparations proceed. The importance of the representative is evidently considerable. In one case, a laborer who was a transient in the area chose to send two representatives he did not know very well to a potential father-in-law whom he in fact knew better. The answer seems to lie in the better bargaining position of an outsider — he is freer to eulogize the virtues of the groom.

582 Theoretically, you may propose to marry any girl. In practice, there is a strong preference for FaBrDa marriage. Certainly a FaBrSo is considered to have first right of refusal. The case of the above mentioned transient laborer brings out the point: He was refused because, said the girl's father «I am afraid my brother's sons will kill me if I give her to you».[1])

The rationalizations and manifest reasons for this preferential marriage pattern are of several types. The father's interest in his daughter is used as an explanation for his preference of a BrSo as a son-in-law: he knows the nephew's possible shortcomings, which reduces the risk of mis-matching; furthermore, he would be able to exert some influence over the groom after marriage, through the agnatic kinship tie, to protect his daughter's interests. It is further usually said that «it is customary» for the nephew to pay only a

[1]) The same transient laborer had at a previous occasion in northern Iraq been refused a girl on similar grounds, although in this case *he* threatened to murder *her* if she was not given to him. The girl was indeed killed shortly afterwards, and the laborer spent a period of time in jail till he was released due to lack of evidence.